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COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND COORDINATION
Thirty-third session
6-22 October 1993 (Part II)
Agenda item 6

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE SECOND PART OF ITS THIRTY-THIRD SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Wolfgang STÖCKL (Germany)

II. PROGRAMME QUESTIONS

Proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995

Section 24. Public information

1. At its 25th meeting, on 14 October 1993, the Committee considered section 24 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995.

Discussion

2. While some delegations stated that the size of the proposed budget of the Department of Public Information was excessive, other delegations felt that the proposed level of resources was commensurate with the work of the Organization in the area of public information.

3. A number of delegations welcomed the restructuring of the Department, and stressed the importance, and need for further strengthening, of its programmes in improving the effectiveness of the Department's information machinery, both on the Headquarters level and in the field.

4. Some delegations felt that the programme should be reviewed against the background of the increasing needs of other priority programmes. They expressed the view that serious streamlining of the Department's activities would provide additional resources that could be reallocated to priority areas.

5. A number of delegations questioned the existence of a mechanism that provided for continuous and systematic evaluation of the Department's programme and activities. It was stated that evaluation was necessary to assess the impact of the Department's outputs compared with the objectives set by the General Assembly. It was felt that evaluation proceedings would also assist in identifying areas of duplication. Some delegations suggested that an external review of the Department should be implemented. Another delegation, while supportive of the concept of evaluation, suggested that such evaluation should be guided by stated objectives.

6. While some delegations emphasized that United Nations publications were highly valued because of their objectives, others regretted that not many were published in Arabic. One delegation specifically requested that the programme include an Arabic version of the publications mentioned in the programme of work, in paragraphs 24.10 - 5 (a), 7 (a), (f) and (m), 8 (b) and (c), and 10 (h), (i) and (j). One other delegation requested that all United Nations languages should be respected. Another delegation emphasized the importance of reaching as large an audience as possible, but made the point that there were many more languages than the six official ones used by the United Nations.

7. Several delegations expressed concern about the treatment of United Nations information centres. A number of delegations remarked that the proposed reduction in resources for information centres could undermine information activities relating to knowledge of the Organization's programmes in a number of countries and regions. Other delegations did not see information centres as a priority. Some delegations commented on the concentration of resources in a number of United Nations information centres, and proposed that resources be reallocated to establishing such centres in developing countries and countries in transition. Some delegations stated that the decisions of the General Assembly were not reflected in the current requirements for United Nations information centres. One delegation expressed the view that the scope of information activities in Nairobi should be comparable with that of the United Nations information services in Geneva and Vienna.

8. A number of delegations referred to the criticism of the United Nations in the media.

9. While several delegations supported the priority designation for information activities on the struggle against apartheid, a number of delegations noted that other priority programmes, as they appeared in the medium-term plan, had not been reflected in the proposed budget. Other delegations felt that there was room for reduction in information activities relating to South Africa and the Middle East.

10. One delegation commented that paragraph 24.73 was superfluous, and accordingly should be deleted from the text of the proposed budget.

11. A number of delegations stressed the importance of the continuation of guided tours at Headquarters.

12. In response to one delegation, the Secretariat undertook to provide consolidated information on resources allocated for public information

activities across the proposed programme budget, including staff requirements, to the General Assembly at its current regular session (forty-eighth).

Conclusions and recommendations

13. The Committee noted that guided tours of United Nations Headquarters constituted an essential part of the public policy of the Organization and recommended that those tours be resumed as soon as possible, taking into account appropriate safety and security considerations.

14. The Committee recommended that the Secretariat should respond more effectively and expeditiously to the criticism of the United Nations in the media.

15. The Committee noted the establishment of the office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for Public Policy, and drew attention to the possible duplication of mandates and activities relating to the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations between the Department of Public Information and the Special Adviser for Public Policy.

16. The Committee recommended approval by the General Assembly of the programme narrative of section 24 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995, subject to the deletion of paragraph 24.73.